



CITY OF TAUNTON AGRICULTURAL COMMISSION

*Southeastern Regional Planning & Economic
Development District (SRPEDD) Office
88 Broadway, Taunton, MA 02780*

Minutes - Regular Meeting Monday, April 22, 2019 at 6:00pm SRPEDD Office - 88 Broadway, Taunton, MA

Meeting called to order at 6:16pm by Jonathan Gray

Members Present: Jonathan Gray, Katie Roberts, and William McCaffrey

Members Not Present: Carol Doherty, Jenna Gouveia, Arthur Lopes

Also present are Bill Napolitano and Helen Zincavage, staff from our regional planning agency the Southeastern Regional Planning & Economic Development District (SRPEDD)

Public Input - none

Discussion of Chase Farm, located at 551 Tremont St.

The property is under CH.61A tax designation for agricultural use. The site is mostly forested, has a house and 2 barns in varying condition, some perennial fruit crops established, 3-4 acres in open field. Jonathan received correspondence in July 2018. The Landowner is the heir of former farmers and they are considering selling the land due to a death in the family of the primary farmer, her father. The farm's grounds have not been maintained. Bill asked if there is a conservation development bylaw or open-space bylaw in existence for Taunton? Members were not sure. Jonathan suggested that going forward it would be good to assist the landowner in finding someone to want to purchase the property for farming. Jonathan will schedule a call with the owner, William will sit in on call as well. [Post-meeting update: 4/29/19 - owner decided to sell the house to a family member and will be moving forward with developing the property for house lots.]

Updates on Fraga Farm (City-owned agricultural land) located at 115 Tremont St.

Jonathan gives background information: this is a City-owned agricultural parcel of approximately 15 acres. It was a former dairy farm, and later hosted a business named Jack's Agway. The most recent owner prior to the City taking it for unpaid taxes filled the farmhouse and lawn with trash and debris. The house was torn down and a huge amount of trash was removed from the site, primarily the front of the site closest to the road. There is an existing barn on the site that was not torn down and could be utilized in the future. Currently, the front

of the site, the southerly end, is being used as a soil storage area for a nearby construction at the Mulcahey School project. Bill has said that he had asked the USDA to assist the City with developing a Farm Plan for the site. He did this prior to the City having an Agricultural Commission.

The next steps for the Commission will be to determine where USDA is at with the Farm Plan, do a walk through with them, the Mayor, and members of the Ag Com to ascertain the condition of the site, and the barn. Bill recommended reaching out to Maggie Payne at USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) because that is who he had reached out to, and they are familiar with the site, and willing to do a farm plan. Typically they don't do farm plans for municipally-owned properties but this is a special opportunity for an underserved area.

Jonathan indicated that the USDA NRSC will help the Agricultural Commission map wetlands and determine 'no-touch' zones, and appropriate uses for the site. Bill said that he discussed with Mayor Hoyer to make sure that when the soil storage/staging is done for the school project, to leave the space "better than they left it" including having it graded for parking lot, applying a gravel covering to the parking area, and a stormwater catch system, since the entire site is adjacent to the Cobb Brook. Bill said that SRPEDD and Resilient Taunton Watershed Network may be able to advise on stormwater management strategies.

Looking forward, Ethel Fraga, who grew up on the farm and now lives on Crapo Street right next door, has informed the City Council that her nephew, Chip Fraga, is willing to come to the site and provide free labor and equipment time to the City at no cost. There is a Taunton Gazette article about this, entitled: "Fraga family offers to help clear former O'Donnell land in Taunton." Chip Fraga runs a solar development corporation and has heavy equipment used for clearing land which in this case can be used to revive the agricultural fields for cultivation. Chip Fraga will help with the cleanup only if the City has a plan developed for the site. Jonathan says it's our commission's job to come up with that plan. That plan will need to include what vegetation to preserve, and what the management and purpose will be for the site. Mayor Hoyer has expressed interest in having the site be open for passive recreation and use the barn for public and potentially private events as well. Katie mentioned that the Soule Homestead Education Center in Middleborough would be a great example of what the site could eventually become.

Bill indicated there is approximately \$130,000 set aside for agricultural improvements for this site that is the result of a settlement between the Massachusetts Environmental Policy Act Office (MEPA) and the Taunton Development Corporation for an unrelated property. Jonathan needs to follow up with Dick Shafer from the Taunton Development Corporation to identify more details about that funding. Jonathan will also work on setting up a site visit.

Updates on the Bristol Commons Community Garden located at 100 Ferris Ln.

Jonathan & Carol Doherty met with Karen Cruz and Colleen Doherty of the Taunton Housing Authority on April 3rd to discuss their community garden located at the Bristol Commons housing development. Karen expressed interest in having the Ag Com help with the garden management. Jonathan and Carol later met with Melissa Santos, who is involved in the Taunton Community Gardens. She is having a planning meeting on April 26, 2019 to discuss recruiting gardeners for the Bristol Commons garden and helping to manage the space.

Correspondence from Herban Acres Farm in Taunton

Jonathan said that Herban Acres is apparently the first MDAR-licensed hemp grower in Taunton. One of the farmers, Drew, had previously been selling mixed vegetables at local farmers markets in Taunton and New Bedford. Jonathan had reached out to Drew to ask about his business. Drew had commented that he was unsure if the Taunton Police Department would understand the distinction between legal hemp and illegal cannabis. **Motion to have Chair write a letter to Mayor and Chief of Police giving a brief explanation on hemp in Massachusetts, offering support for any farms growing hemp in Taunton. Motion passes.** [Update: 7/7/19 - Corresponded with Herban Acres, letter of support not necessary at this time.]

Correspondence with the Greening the Gateway Cities Program

Jonathan had a phone conversation with a staff member of the State's Greening the Gateway Cities Program. It is a state-funded opportunity for residents to get free trees planted at their homes, as well as on public grounds. The program will likely be designated in an area of the city that needs additional tree canopy cover. This program is free to both residents and the City, and it is run by the State of Mass to try to improve the air quality in Gateway cities, and also to reduce electric usage, since trees shade homes which reduces air conditioner usage. The City of Taunton will be likely be a recipient of the programs services in the next few years because Fall River, Brockton, and New Bedford have already been a part of the program the last few years. Once the program reaches their goal number of trees planted in a city, the State moves on to a new community. The State staffer on the phone indicated it was likely that once Brockton's tree planters were finished planting in that City, they may be moved to Taunton. The Greening the Gateway Cities Program is run by the Secretary of Energy and Environmental Affairs. Jonathan indicated we may want to reach out to our State legislative delegation on this. William asked if the state would plant only shade trees, or potentially fruit trees. Jonathan wasn't sure, but the emphasis sounded like shade trees. Jonathan will keep the Commission in the loop if there are any new developments on this program.

Correspondence with IT Department about Ag Com page on city's website

Jonathan had emailed City of Taunton IT Director, Paul Arikian. He is in the process of getting Ag Com page created with city. Jonathan will ensure there is some sort of announcement/launch on city website when page is added and minutes and work plan are posted.

Set next meeting date

No meeting date decided yet. Poll to be sent to Commission.

Discussion of the Commission's 5-year work plan

Continued outline of potential projects to work on. [See attached 3rd draft work plan]

Jonathan stated the interim Mass in Motion coordinator Leah Serafin has expressed an interest in working with us on a Community Food Plan. The Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) could be involved in helping with this since Mass in Motion has free technical assistance from MAPC. Also, MAPC has already done community food assessments for other towns, could be good examples to look at. Bill suggested Mass in Motion may want to meet with the Southeastern Massachusetts Food Security Network. SRPEDD is a regional Planning agency, and could also find funding to give hours on technical assistance to this. The City could also work on getting a grant from the Island Foundation to get a food assessment done.

Katie will look into the FoodCorps (foodcorps.org), and getting an intern for the City with appropriate skill set for Taunton. Eligibility for this is determined by the number of kids that qualify for free or reduced lunch in the school system, which Taunton may qualify for. The FoodCorps functions similar to Americorp, a stipend for an intern doing grassroots projects such as community gardens, workshops, similar to a staff person, for 1 year term. We could keep getting someone annually. City would have to get the funding for the stipend. Bill suggested the Ag Com could find banks that could help fund the intern through the Community Reinvestment Act - even Walmart, or Supermarkets could take advantage of the CRA.

William asked if pollinator habitat was within the Ag Com's purview. Katie said there seems to be merging project opportunities with city parks, pollinator habitat, and with Conservation Commission, Parks Dept., and if appointed, an Open Space Committee. Ag Com could collaborate with other City stakeholders on this.

Next Steps for the work plan:

Bill suggests break this work plan down into categories, consolidating items, have on-going policies, short term projects, long term, outreach, etc. and figure out which subcommittees we would need for the biggest focuses that go beyond what the monthly Ag Com meetings are capable of.

Announcements

- MAAC Ag Com Boot Camp: Pesticides 101, April 24th, 6-8 pm, Norfolk Aggie
- Bristol Commons Comm. Garden Steering Committee Meeting, Friday, April 26th
- Bristol Aggie Spring Expo, May 5th, 10AM-3PM, 135 Center St. Dighton, MA
- NOFA/RI Tour of Meatworks Processing Facility, May 5th, Westport, MA
- Bristol Commons Comm. Garden Kickoff event, May 11th from 11am-1pm at Bristol Commons Community Room, Ferris Ln, Taunton, MA

Motion to adjourn at 8:14pm. Motion passes.

[See attached work plan draft below]

ADDENDUM (2 PAGES)

Taunton Agricultural Commission DRAFT 5 year Work Plan - 3rd Draft

This work plan is still in process, additional items can be added/considered.

Organizational, Partnerships, Funding:

- Should we develop a 501(c)3 for the Ag Com?
- Develop an urban ag resource list to put on the Ag Com/City website
- What can we promote or initiate to help our people/community. Promote transitional farming, options, and provide assistance, and links to assistance.
- Defining agriculture and coming up with a community vision
- Work on Branding the Ag Com
- Where/when do we have a seat at the table? (e.g. development review)
- Pursue alternative funding methods to facilitate ag land preservation. Identify our partners and resources in terms of technical and financial assistance.
- Identify specific projects to be completed within 5 year work plan (Fraga Farm, Bristol Commons, etc.)
- Look at adding a FoodCorps member to Ag Com project work plan.

Policy:

- Identify what support services are needed
- Should we be a Right to Farm community
- Work with Board of Health (BOH) to review BOH regulations and look at conflicts with existing state regulations
- Look at City policies and regulations for conflicts/inconsistencies/etc.
- Look at zoning - is it farm friendly; where do we need change; look at Somerville's ABC's of Urban Agriculture

Communications & Community Education:

- Make the entities that we are supporting aware that we exist and we are supporting them.
- Communications plan that integrates all facets of communications. Includes print, video, and other resources that will promote and empower practicing and aspiring urban and suburban farmers
- Promotion of existing ag operations in Taunton (various means), also include promotion of healthy food access at farmers markets, pop-up markets, and venues selling local food products.
- Work on educational workshops and direct community services that they can utilize (soil tests, farm planning, etc.)
- Utilize the website, create a facebook page, email address
- Finding existing policies and city programs that reduce fees for farmers (BOH, Water Dept, Sewer fees, etc.) and make this list more publicly available

Community Assessments:

- Assessment of farming community -- how many farms, what's their specialty, do they have contact info, is their land in APR or CH61, do they think Taunton is a farm-friendly community?
- Ag potential of City-owned land (lease, farm, market)
- How do we work with the state to maximize the potential of state-owned ag land in Taunton (Taunton State Hospital, Massasoit State Park Cranberry Bog)